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THE STUDY
This paper presented is part of the larger study to determine the impact of the First Words in Print (FWIP) project since its inception in 2002 to its ending in 2009 and the extent to which the project achieved its aims. This paper examines the role of libraries and civil society engagement in the project, with Ottery Library as an example. Fieldwork was done among a sample of children in Ottery in the Western Cape, to examine whether the project had a positive impact among them in terms of literacy, reading habits and educational performance.

The project has its roots in civil society engagement. In 2000 CFB, in partnership with the Nordic Council of Ministers, hosted a workshop to discuss the urgent need in South Africa for children between the ages of 0 and 5 to be given access to books. Delegates included representatives from various organisations involved in books, literacy and early childhood education. At this workshop a consensus was reached on the importance of placing books directly in the hands of children aged 0 to 5 years, to stimulate their interest in books and to develop in children and their families a sense of books as objects of pleasure and entertainment that could be used and shared in many different ways in the home, rather than simply sources of information and formal learning in school. The workshop delegates resolved to initiate the FWIP project [FWIP (Draft, working copy) undated].

THE AIMS OF FWIP OR ISIQALO:

- enhance a reading culture in very young children to stimulate their development by giving them books;
- encourage South African writers, illustrators and publishers to produce appropriate literature for children aged 0 – 6 years;
- distribute sets of picture and story books in all South African official languages to children to help build a common culture of literature for future generations;
- facilitate and encourage a culture of reading within the communities where the project is
implemented (FWIP (Draft, working copy)).

THE BASELINE STUDY 2002
The first research study undertaken for FWIP was a baseline study. Angela Schaffer and Kathy Watters were appointed in 2002 to conduct a comprehensive baseline study the pilot areas: Maphotla in Mpumalanga, Rammulotse in Free State, Ottery in Western Cape and Mount Ayliff in Eastern Cape. In each area the study covered 100 households with children under the age of six. The study investigated literacy and education levels, the use of books and libraries amongst parents and young children and accessibility of reading materials.

FINDINGS
The baseline study highlighted the following important issues (Final summary report, p.4):

- There was a great need for children's books in the pilot areas. The majority of young children in the four areas had little or no exposure to books or reading. There was a lack of children's picture books in all the households and in many of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. The children's books in the ECD centres which had collections tended to be unsuitable, Eurocentric English stories.
- It was vitally important to include support and orientation of caregivers, vis-à-vis sharing books with their children, in order to ensure the success of the project. (This suggested very strongly that FWIP needed to work in partnership and collaboratively with organisations that could offer this support and/or develop a fully-fledged training component in its work.)
- FWIP should make wider use of local community organisations and groups for the distribution of books and implementation of the project. Ways and means of developing local library capacity so that libraries can promote books and reading amongst children and caregivers effectively, needed to be considered.

THE BOOKS
The first phase of the project, the pilot phase, started 2002. The second phase ran from 2004 to 2005, the third in 2007 and the fourth phase in 2009. During these four phases 14 books were developed, all of them were translated into the 11 official languages of South Africa.
**Phase one (2002-2003)**

1. ‘Horns Only’ written by Fathima Dada, Leoni Hofmeyr and Gcina Mhlophe and illustrated by Heather Moore and Jiggs Snaddon-Wood, published by Maskew Miller Longman.

2. ‘Thandeka's Gift’ written by Fathima Dada, Leoni Hofmeyr and Gcina Mhlophe and illustrated by Pandora Alberts, published by Maskew Miller Longman.

3. ‘Abongi's Journey’ conceptualised by Kerry Saadien-Raad and illustrated by Tasia Rosser, published by Ampersand. This is a wordless picture book.


**Phase two (2004-2005)**

1. ‘What's down that hole?’ a story book written and illustrated by Clea Berge, published by Centre for the Book and Sappi.

2. ‘Now, Mama!’ written and illustrated by Catherine Kraetschmer, published by Centre for the Book and Sappi.


4. ‘Lindi and Gogo’ written and illustrated by Thembi Mwelase, née Shiela Verner, published by Centre for the Book and Sappi.

**Phase three (2007)**


**Phase four (2009)**

1. ‘The Cool Nguni’ written by Maryanne Bester, illustrated by Shayle Bester, published by Jacana (was selected by Exclusive Books’ for their ‘The Children’s Best Books Guide 2008’).
2. ‘Wake up’ by Ian Lusted and Comien van Wyk, published by Garamond.
3. ‘I could be anywhere’ written and illustrated by Catherine Groenewald, published by Centre for the Book and Sappi (was one of the Sappi book competition entries).

**DISTRIBUTION**

By the end of 2009, a total of 67 260 packs of books (236 190 books) were distributed in various areas in different provinces in South Africa as follows:

- First phase – 10 000 packs of four books in five languages = 40 000 books
- Second phase - 24 410 packs of four books in eight languages = 97 640 books
- Third phase – 27 150 packs of three books in eleven languages = 81 450 books
- Fourth phase – 5 700 packs of three books in seven languages = 17 100 books.

The following table illustrates the distribution of the book packs during the four phases and the partner organisations in the various provinces:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>Ottery Library</td>
<td>2 500</td>
<td>1 500</td>
<td>1 600</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gugulethu Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>600</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Langa Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>READ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>Maphotla Library</td>
<td>2 500</td>
<td>4 150</td>
<td>4 000</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>11 450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>Sakhisizwe Primary School, Mount Ayliff</td>
<td>2 500</td>
<td>2 300</td>
<td>1 200</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>6 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bethesda Art Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>Rammulotsi (Ntataise Trust)</td>
<td>2 500</td>
<td>2 500</td>
<td>1 800</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>7 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>Rammulotsi Library</td>
<td>1 000</td>
<td>1 000</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>Lesedi Educare Centre</td>
<td>2 050</td>
<td>4 000</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>6 450</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>Kgalagadi Municipality</td>
<td>3 600</td>
<td>1 800</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>6 300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KZN</td>
<td>Family Literacy Project</td>
<td>1 200</td>
<td>1 300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2 800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farm Family Literacy Project</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 000</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2 300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training and Resources in Early Education</td>
<td>3 110</td>
<td>3 000</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>6 410</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(TREE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zisizeni (KwaMagwaza Primary School)</td>
<td>1 000</td>
<td>1 850</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>Thusanang ECD Association</td>
<td>2 000</td>
<td>2 500</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>4 980</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faranani</td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Venda</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 000</td>
<td>24 410</td>
<td>27 150</td>
<td>5 700</td>
<td>67 260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FWIP: Report (undated, p: 4; with corrections to calculations)

**PARTNER ORGANISATIONS**

FWIP did not have the capacity and did not want to develop an organisation with branches in each of the targeted areas, it therefore partnered with appropriate local structures working with young children. The partner organisations assisted with the distribution of books and with follow-up support work with the caregivers of the recipient children. The strategy for long-term sustainability was to develop strong voluntary area teams that represented every sector of the community, i.e. government departments, church- and community-based organisations, the private sector, libraries and librarians, and clinics. Librarians, who play a pivotal role in liaising with the general public, were central to this strategy. The creation of a long-term partnership between libraries, publishers and caregivers of young children was seen as essential and FWIP acted as a catalyst for the coming together of the various partners (Schaffer & Watters, 2003:6).

Although various sectors were represented in each area, at every site one of the partners took main responsibility for the distribution. Public libraries or ECD Centres were often leading partner organisations. In Ottery, Ottery library played an important role in getting the various
role players in the areas together, distributing the books, and providing support and training. The librarian who was at that stage responsible for Ottery Library, Fadeela Davids, played a leading role in the project and was also actively involved in the Steering Committee. Karen van der Heyden, the current librarian at Ottery Library, who was a volunteer at that stage, was also actively involved in FWIP.

OTTERY

‘A three-year-old girl looks out of a garage in Ottery on the Cape Flats, in which she sits with her mother yesterday. The bullet holes in the door (of which there are a total of nine) are from a gang-related shooting earlier in the day in which a man was killed’

Ottery, also known as Montagu's Gift, is a predominantly ‘coloured’ residential area in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. It is part of the larger suburb of Grassy Park and covers an area of approximately two and a half square kilometres. Streets of working class households predominate, but are interspersed with pockets of middle-class households (FWIP Final summary report, p 5). There are several large, high density, blocks of council flats in the area. Unemployment, harsh living conditions, lack of recreational facilities, gangsterism and substance abuse are rife. Of the four areas selected for the FWIP pilot phase in 2002, Ottery was the most urbanized. However, in common with the other pilot areas, the children living in the area were disadvantaged in terms of access to books and a culture that supports and promotes reading (De Beer, 2004:8).

When the FWIP baseline study was conducted in 2002, Ottery had no fully fledged public library. The Ottery Reference Library, a non-circulating satellite of Grassy Park Public Library, was open for a few hours several times per week. The stock consisted mainly of children’s books and non-fiction and reference books for use by learners and students in the area. The library was the focal point for the FWIP distribution in 2002 (De Beer, 2004:10).

In 2002 it was found that less than half of the residents in the Ottery research sample had reading books for adults in their homes and only 55% had children’s books. There appeared to be no culture of reading. The researchers saw very few books and the majority of the interviewees said

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1 Davids, Nashira, Philani Nombembe and Shelley Christians ‘Another day, another body on Cape Flats’ 18 January 2013 http://m.timeslive.co.za/?articleId=7775288
that they did not like to read books (De Beer, 2004:10). Reading and books did not feature among the interests and priorities of many residents (Schaffer, 2002:29).

During the pilot phase, 2 500 book packs were distributed in Ottery, mainly facilitated by Ottery Library. Thereafter, 1 500 and 1 600 book packs were distributed during the second and third phases, and none during the fourth phase. Thus, a total of 5 600 book packs were distributed among the children in Ottery.

In 2005 the FWIP Project Coordinator at that time, Lorato Trok, visited Ottery to do follow-up research among FWIP recipients. She interviewed a total of 23 recipients about the FWIP books. She found that the books have been well received, well kept and used by the recipients. A number of children read books other than the FWIP books. Eleven parents reported that they visited libraries with their children to get more books (Trok, 2007:8).

**2013 FIELDWORK**
The aim of the fieldwork was to determine whether FWIP had any impact on the recipients beyond the distribution stages. Ottery was chosen as a case study for this research due to its proximity to Centre for the Book, which made it the most cost efficient option for fieldwork. Even though Ottery was the most urbanized of the FWIP areas, it was in many aspects similar to the other areas in terms of poverty and a lack of reading culture. The results should thus be fairly representative of the situation that exists in other FWIP areas.

Little has changed in Ottery in the past ten years. Although many of the blocks of flats (known as ‘the skurwe flats’) have been spruced up, the area still remains marked by poverty, unemployment, harsh living conditions, lack of recreational facilities, gangsterism and substance abuse. The fieldwork had to be postponed several times due to gang-related shootings in the area. The Ottery Reference Library has since been developed into a fully-fledged lending library.

**SURVEY FINDINGS**
A total of 63 children were surveyed. Initially, the intention was to trace only those children whose names were on the FWIP distribution lists. Copies of the lists were left at schools and staff was asked to identify learners who attended their schools. The result was that only small numbers of children were identified at the some schools and none at others. After that, we expanded the survey to include all children of the appropriate age group that we found at Ottery
Library, the New Apostolic Church’s holiday programme and at a number of flats in the Ottery area. This proved to be a better strategy as we found a number of children whose names were not on our distribution lists, but who said that they had received the books. This indicated that the lists we that had in our possession were not complete.

The questionnaire used for the fieldwork was designed to determine whether the project had any discernable or measurable impact on the recipients ten years after receiving the books. The most obvious factors to examine were their reading habits and educational performance. The questions were formulated to uncover these factors. However, it must be kept in mind that the FWIP project is only one aspect in a wide range of variables that impact on children’s reading habits and educational performances but the purpose of this study is to focus only on FWIP to the exclusion of other possible variables.

The children surveyed were aged from 10 to 17. These children would have been aged 0-7 during the three phases that distribution took place in Ottery distribution. The results of the survey are purely based on the children’s answers. The accuracy of their answers was not checked; this would require a more in-depth study.

The children were shown copies of the FWIP book covers. The books have made such a big impression on the children growing up in their book-deprived community, that up to ten years later most of them recognised the books, even though they were very young at that time. The majority (47 children or 74.6% of the respondents) recognised at least some of the books and remembered getting them when they were younger, while 16 (25.4%) did not. It is also notable that 13 (20.6%) still had some of the books.

46 or 73% remembered reading some of the books; including four of the children who said that they did not get the books. All those who remembered getting the books said that other family members and friends also read their books. 46 or 73% said the books have had a positive impact on them citing factors like enjoying the books, using the books to learn to read and spell, and wanting to read more. They also remembered passing on the books to siblings, cousins and friends. The books thus had a wider reach beyond the recipient children which makes the project a very good return on the investment.

In response to the question whether they were reading any other books now, 44 (69.8%) said yes while 17 (27%) said no. The largest group of children (14 or 22.2%) said that they read four
books per month, while the second largest group (13 or 20.6%) said that did not read any books. 22 (34.9%) said they had no books at home. 14 of the 22 respondents with no books at home, indicated that they did not read books at all. Among those who had books, the most likely size of their book collections ranged from five to eight books. Several respondents indicated that the books at home consisted mostly of religious materials.

Of the 63 respondents, 30 (47.6%) said they were members of a public library, 26 (41.3%) said they were not, while 7 (11.1%) said they were library members previously, but not currently. 24 (38%) said they did not visit the library, while 9 (14.3%) visited the library every week and 9 (14.3%) every second week. Some of the children who did not go to the library blamed the gang violence and shootings in the area. To the question whether they and their families enjoyed reading, 40 (63.5%) said yes, 10 (15.9%) said no, and 14 (22.2%) mentioned relatives, mostly female members of the family: mothers, sisters, aunts and grandmothers. Reading was often seen as an activity done by females.

To the question relating to their academic performances, 16 (25.4%) indicated that they fared excellent, 27 (42.8%) well, 17 (27%) average, and only 3 (4.8%) poor. However, the high number of respondents who have repeated a grade 24 (38%) is a concern; two of the children repeated a grade twice. The grades most often repeated were grade 1 (4 children), grade 2 (4 children) and grade 3 (3 children). It is difficult to determine whether receiving the FWIP books had any discernable or measurable impact on the children’s educational achievement.

Faranaaz Daniels, who taught at the Rooikappie Crèche in Ottery during FWIP distribution and who is still teaching there, said that the project made a big impression on the children and the community. She said that there was an upsurge in interest in reading, storytelling and books, amongst the children, their families and in their homes, crèches and pre-schools. In her opinion, FWIP was the best thing that could have happened to the Ottery community (Daniels, interview, 12/06/2013). The previous studies confirmed that FWIP lead to an upsurge in interest in reading, storytelling and books amongst the children, their families and in their homes, crèches and pre-schools. The results of the fieldwork indicate that many of the children continued reading. However, from discussions with the children and teachers, one is left with the impression that little was done to sustain the upsurge in the Ottery community. FWIP was a once-off occurrence in their lives, thereafter the upsurge dissipated. This was also confirmed by the Ottery librarian
who said the project just died away. The Ottery fieldwork illustrates that while FWIP had an impact on the children of Ottery, for some the impact had a limited time-span.

FWIP AIMS: EXTENT REACHED

First aim:

‘To enhance a reading culture in very young children to stimulate their development by giving them books.’

An estimated 40 000 children received book packs. As illustrated by the Ottery fieldwork, it is likely that their siblings, relatives and friends would also have benefitted from having the books in their homes. Thus more children than the figures suggests were read to or read FWIP books, which created the conditions needed to enhance a reading culture in very young children. The previous evaluation studies showed evidence of increased literacy and pre-literacy activities among the FWIP recipients. The project thus contributed towards the early literacy development of very young children in recipient communities. However, the vast majority of very young children in poverty-stricken homes in South Africa have not been reached by FWIP or any other literacy programmes. Most young children today are still not exposed to books and reading.

The first aim has thus been reached only to a very limited extent, and much still needs to be done to create a culture of reading among very young children. To be more effective, this aim should be amended to read: ‘To create, enhance and sustain a reading culture in very young children to stimulate their development by giving them books’. These three factors should go together.

Second aim:

‘To encourage South African writers, illustrators and publishers to produce appropriate literature for children aged 0 – 6 years.’

CFB, together with organisations such as PRAESA, Biblionef and others, promoted the idea that in order to promote a culture of reading, children needed appropriate books in their home languages. Today this view is widely accepted and there is unambiguous support in South Africa for writing and publishing children’s books in all indigenous languages.

Initiatives such as FWIP provided a catalyst for South African writers, illustrators and publishers to produce and publish relevant beautifully illustrated books in all South African official languages. FWIP was among the first projects where writing competitions was used to develop
new children’s books. Similarly, since 2008 Room to Read used competitions to the same effect (Edwards and Ngwaru, 2010:20-21). The growing number of South African authors, such as Carole Bloch, Niki Daly, Phindi Dlamini and Gcina Mhlope, ensured that children’s books now speak to the everyday realities of a broad range of South African children (Edwards and Ngwaru, 2010:17). In addition, CFB, PRAESA, Room to Read, and other organisations, organise workshops for aspiring children’s writers and illustrators, which contributed to the growing pool of South African children’s writers and illustrators who produce appropriate literature for children in their mother tongues.

However, there is still a dearth of books suitable for children under six. Analysis of PASA’s 2007 ‘Writing in Nine Tongues’ catalogue, show for the various age bands, the lowest number of books published by South African publishers was for early childhood. The school market remains publishers’ primary focus. The importance of providing books to children in their early childhood years has not yet gained widespread implementation (Edwards and Ngwaru, 2010:20-21). Thus, although there have been much improvement in writing, illustrating and publishing children’s literature, there is still room for improvement. This aim has thus been only partly reached and more can be done to produce more literature for very young children.

**Third aim:**

‘The aim to distribute sets of picture and story books in all South African official languages to children to help build a common culture of literature for future generations.’

The FWIP books are available in all the official South African languages. By translating the same books into the various South African languages, FWIP has taken steps towards building a common culture of literature for future generations. This nation-building strategy is also successfully used by other organisations like PREASA and Biblionef. However, many children have not yet been reached by these projects. Much still needs to be done to achieve this aim.

**Fourth aim:**

‘The aim to facilitate and encourage a culture of reading within the communities where the project is implemented.’

The evaluation studies of the previous phases of FWIP showed that enhancing a culture of reading was not only limited to children, but also to their communities. The 2009 workshop
attendees reported a noticeable change in the culture of reading within the communities where
the project is implemented. People were reading more. However, this happened only in the
recipient communities, and measures must be taken to ensure that the culture of reading is
sustained. Much still needs to be done to achieve this aim.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
In spite of many gains that have been made the past 10 years, the conditions that gave rise to the
project in 2002 are still the norm for many children in South Africa. Many children’s homes still
lack books and many children experience low literacy levels and poor educational achievement.
There is also still a dearth of age-appropriate books in the local idiom available to very young
children in their mother tongues. There is still a profound lack of reading culture in South Africa.
The aims of the project as expressed in 2002 are still as relevant today as it was then.

Empirical evidence, previous FWIP evaluations, as well as this current research, shows that
FWIP is a project that is worth the investment in the future of children in South Africa. The
project has potential to make a difference in the lives of children in poverty-stricken
communities. However, a once-off intervention is not enough where the conditions that exist in
communities and families are not supportive of a reading culture.

As the project has immense value it should continue. The following recommendations are
proposed:

Management of project

For FWIP to succeed as an effective project, it will require strong leadership from CFB to drive
the project forward. If CFB decides to continue with FWIP it has to decide exactly what the
nature and scope of the project would be. CFB will also have to decide whether it wants civil
society engagement and what the nature and scope of that engagement would be. However, the
project can greatly benefit from a strong degree of civil society engagement in all aspects.
Irrespective whether CFB decides to do it alone or in partnership with other organisations, it is
clear that the project requires a full time coordinator with this project as a sole responsibility. The
current Children’s Literature Coordinator is responsible for several other projects which mean
that there are very little time available to devote to this project.
A lack of continuity was identified by several previous participants as a major problem. To assist with this, a committee of practitioners in the fields of child development and children’s literature, and librarians can be established to assist the coordinator. In this way the project can draw on valuable human resources and ensure the continuity and sustainability of the project, even when the coordinator responsible for the project changes.

While CFB should take responsibility for the implementation and sustainability of the project in the various areas identified for future expansion, it would be prudent to train and appoint area managers in these areas who could be responsible for the actual day-to-day, hands-on running of the project in the various areas; these area managers can be based in libraries and could work closely with local librarians. The area managers can also ensure that the project is not just a once-off occurrence but that programmes are implemented and support continues even after the FWIP distribution stage. While volunteers can assist, they cannot be expected to take full responsibility for all the tasks involved and might lose interests if they are not paid. Paid area managers would provide stability and continuity while volunteers come and go.

**The children**

The project should continue to focus on children of pre-school age: 0 to 6. At this age children need to acquire the important pre-literacy skills that they need in order to establish a foundation to enjoy reading and become avid and life-long readers and learners. Poverty-stricken families often cannot afford to send their children to ECD Centres where they might be exposed to books, so concerted efforts must be made to reach the stay-at-home children as well. Libraries could play a role here, as they could implement programmes to encourage caregivers to bring children to the libraries, e.g. storytelling sessions directed specifically at stay-at-home pre-schoolers.

**The areas**

There are two possible options available to choose the areas for the next phase of FWIP. The first option is to continue the project in the areas selected for the previous phases. The advantages are many: the people in these areas are already familiar with the project which would make it easier to re-establish the project; partner organisations have already been identified; book distribution networks have already been established and the project would be able to build on previous work done to establish a culture of reading. The second option is to identify new areas to establish the project. In these areas new partnerships will have to be established. Libraries are the logical
The books

During the evaluation of the first phase concerns were raised that the initial spurt of enthusiasm for reading would be short-lived as four books would be insufficient to provide a wide enough range of reading experiences to develop future readers. The Ottery fieldwork shows that the spurt was in actual fact short-lived. So it is essential to continue developing new books for FWIP. There is still a dearth of books suitable for children under six, which makes it important that this component of the project continues.

Training and support

Training and support capacity are important to the success of the project. The books must not just be handed over to children as a once-off exercise. There need to be interventions to support caregivers, families and schools with the necessary skills and resources to build and sustain the reading habit for long after the children receive their FWIP books. This is where FWIP area managers and partners, especially libraries, in each of the targeted districts can play important roles. The project should also include workshops for the adults on developing and sustaining a culture of literacy. This would ensure that the adults are actively involved in the process of enabling the children to access the books and develop their literacy or pre-literacy skills. This is also an opportunity to get the active participation caregivers, librarians, teachers, health workers, community representatives and others involved in the care and education of children, to ensure that the project has buy-in and active participation from communities where FWIP books are distributed. This type of buy-in and active participation would be needed to ensure that a reading culture is sustained. Working with organizations that are already established in the various areas would be the most efficient use of available resources.

CONCLUSION

FWIP contributed to the growth of South African children’s literature, specifically for the often neglected zero to six age group. Fourteen children’s books were developed, translated into all the official languages and distributed to an estimated 40 000 children. Furthermore, these books reached an even wider audience through recipients passing the books on to others and through the efforts of CFB and other literacy development organisations, schools, crèches, bookstores
and libraries. Another milestone was that the children’s books were made available in the indigenous languages, a boost for mother tongue literature development.

The Ottery fieldwork illustrates that the project has made an impact in the recipients reading habits. However, if FWIP remains a once-off occurrence in its recipients lives, and nothing is done to build and sustain a reading habit after the distribution period, the project loses much of its impact. Ultimately, to have the greatest impact the project should create, enhance and sustain a reading culture in very young children which should continue well beyond childhood.

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